

MILITARY SPEECHWRITING AND PUBLIC SPEAKING

by Captain James E. Hutton, Military Analyst, CALL

" . . . tell the story of America's Army. It's a good news story. It's happening every day. I often say that soldiers are our credentials. . . . We must talk an awful lot about them to the American people. We must talk an awful lot about them to Congress. . . . We have a great military. . . . It's the world's best military."¹
---GENERAL Dennis J. Reimer

Introduction

Communicating the Army's story to the public takes many forms. In addition to the use of the various media outlets, public speaking engagements provide uninterrupted and unfiltered communications with public groups both internal and external. Further, speaking to the public provides commanders with an instant feel of public perceptions in a way that media product analysis cannot.

This article provides the tools for writing speeches and public speaking. The first section focuses on preparation of a speech including visit(s) to the commander, script preparation, time management and rehearsals, and staffing procedures. In the second section, the emphasis shifts to delivering the speech. The discussion includes audience evaluation, concentration on key messages, uniform and appearance, tips for speakers, and after-action-reviews. Public speaking is a valuable community relations tool in relating the Army's story to groups small and large both in the neighboring community or to soldiers. We should take each opportunity seriously and ensure our products deliver the commander's intended message.

Speechwriting

Speechwriting is the first and most important step to a public speaking engagement. This process often involves the commander, the speaker (often the commander), the speechwriter or writing team, the community relations officer (or media relations officer), and the staff. The public affairs officer (PAO) is responsible for coordinating the elements for production of the speech.

Early in the process, the speechwriter and PAO will visit the commander for guidance on topic and content. The PAO must be able to provide the commander with an analysis of the engagement to include: date of event, time allotted, a list of other possible speakers, and audience type and size (i.e., professional, military-related, civic, environmental, etc.). The guidance at this point should be general, with the commander providing a topic and key themes to highlight.

Following the commander's guidance, the speechwriter/team will begin script preparation. It is important to write the script for the spoken word. The emphasis is on conversational English and should include the following structural elements:²

1. Attention Step. The opening statement should capture the attention of the audience.

2. Topic/Objective Statement. Describe in clear terms what you will be talking about.

3. Motivation. Tell the audience why they should listen to you.

4. Transition. Begin the transition to your first main point.

5. First Main Point. This is the beginning of the main body of your speech. It is the first of what should be three to four main points.

6. Internal Summary. Succinctly summarize the first main point.

7. Transition. Transition to your next main point. Attempt to tie your first main point to the second.

8. Second Main Point.

9. Internal Summary.

10. Transition.

11. Third Main Point.

12. Internal Summary.

13. Transition.

14. Recap Main Points. Highlight the main points made.

15. Re-motivate. Again remind the audience why your points are important.

16. Forceful Conclusion. Concisely and strongly make the final thought you want to leave with the audience.

17. Close.

After completion of the first draft of the speech, refinement is necessary. Have a speaker not related to the project read the speech aloud to the speechwriter or speechwriting team and the PAO. The team and the PAO will listen for clarity, conversational language, jargon, and determine if time constraints are met. It is best to have more than one reader for the speech due to variations in reading rates.

The writer(s) should then prepare an advanced draft that incorporates the changes from the reading. For script production, the team can use the following tips as a guide:³

- Triple-space the script. Some speakers prefer the script to be in all capital letters. Often, however, all capital letters on a page can run together. The speaker's preference is the guide.
- Underline or highlight key points.
- Consider leaving a large margin on the left side of the page. Speakers sometimes make last-minute changes and can use the margin for handwritten notes. The margin will also be easier to follow. Some speakers have difficulty following text across an entire page. Again the speaker's preference is key.
- Consider leaving a large margin at the bottom of a page. This will prevent the speaker's eyes from dropping low.
- Do not split sentences between pages. If necessary, leave extra margin to push the beginning of a new sentence onto the next page.
- Provide text that is in plain English. (Even if the audience is military, the levels of understanding of jargon, in-office acronyms, and other localisms vary widely.)

The prepared text should then be staffed as necessary to ensure the correctness of information. Advise the staff elements reviewing the document that the role of the staff in this process is to evaluate the accuracy of the information, not to rewrite text or provide clever phrases. A speech that is rewritten by too many people can become diluted and disjointed.

As a courtesy, provide the next higher level command with a copy of the final draft. In the case of speeches to be delivered by lieutenant generals and above, it is normally a requirement to have a higher level review. Review major command (MACOM) and Department of the Army (DA) guidance.

Deliver the final text to the speaker in a timely manner, providing adequate time for rehearsal and revision.

Public Speaking

Speaking as a representative of the Army is a valuable way to reach key publics. With speech in hand, the speaker still must complete the preparation process. The speaker should review the text and rehearse by reading aloud to the speechwriters and the PAO. By making minor text adjustments, the speaker can fit the text to his "voice."

Prior to the speech, the speaker must check his uniform and personal appearance. Personal appearance is important -- it makes the first impression. Usually a Class "A" uniform is appropriate for speaking engagements.

The speaker must clearly understand the main points and, as is frequently the case, must be prepared to answer questions following the speech. The speaker should mingle

as much as possible before the speech with the audience to get a "feel" for the mood and level of understanding of the audience.

Speakers can use the following tips during a speech to ensure the maximum effectiveness:⁴

- Care about your speech. If you do not care, certainly the audience will not.
- Concentrate exclusively on your points and the audience.
- Maintain your bearing and always appear in control. ("Never let 'em see you sweat.")
- Gain as much eye contact as possible, especially when making your main points.
- Pause when necessary. An occasional pause allows the audience to digest your key points.
- Always keep in mind that you know more about your subject than anyone in the room. You are the pro!

Following a speech, an after-action review will greatly assist the speaker and speechwriter(s). The PAO should informally talk to audience members and ask them if they fully understood the talk. He can assess how well they understood the messages by talking about the main points and listening closely to audience member responses. Often following a speech, a period is set aside for questions and answers. The speaker and PAO can quickly evaluate the effectiveness of the speech by listening to the types of questions put forth.

The PAO should also assist the speaker by pointing out how well he delivered the speech. Use the following tools to examine the speaker's delivery:

- Did the speaker use a staccato delivery style? If so, assist the speaker for future events by encouraging pauses. If possible, videotape the speech -- speakers often can see for themselves areas for improvement.
- Did the speaker speak clearly? Usually, slowing the speech can correct this problem.
- Did he maintain eye contact at key junctures? Practice eye contact when making the main points.
- Depending on the experience level of the speaker, this list can be expanded. Just as with any other military operation or function, we always want to improve the next time we are faced with a similar situation.

Conclusion

Public speaking allows our leaders and communities to come together in ways that are not possible through the vast array of media relations and written statements. Commanders and PAOs can use speaking engagements to forward key information points to public groups without abbreviation or filtering. PAOs and speechwriters must prepare quality products by gaining command guidance and producing a well-thought-out and properly staffed script. Speakers can deliver the product by involving

themselves in the planning process, ensuring a good personal appearance, rehearsing, and making contact with the audience. Keeping the American public informed about the activities of *their* great Army will maintain confidence in our force and lead to greater readiness in the future!

Notes:

1. Dennis J. Reimer, General, U.S. Army, text of speech to the National Guard Association, Washington, D.C., September 2, 1995.
2. The elements described here were derived from a sample community relations speech outline provided for student use at the Defense Information School, Fort Meade, MD - Public Affairs Officer Course, 1995.
3. The tips listed here, in part, come from an undated and unattributed Army pamphlet, *So You're Meeting the Media*, pg. 13.
4. *So You're Meeting the Media*, pg. 11. (Much of this list is paraphrased. Some items have been added, and other deleted from the list as it originally appeared.)